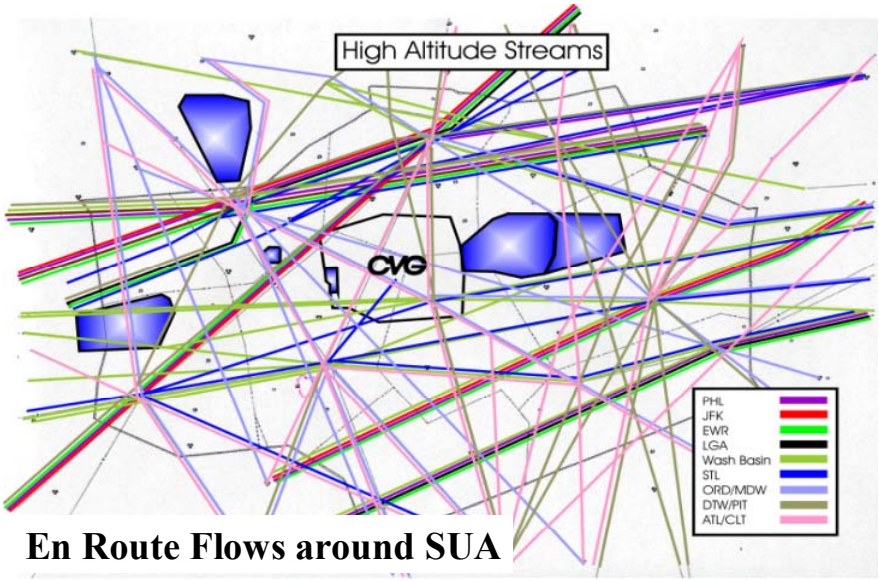
ER-8: Improving Access to Special Use Airspace (SUA)

Improve the efficiencies in which civil aviation is routed through special-use airspace, while providing availability and flexibility to military users.



En Route Flows around SUA

Background

Information on the availability of special use airspace (SUA) for civilian flights is often not timely or is limited to unrealistic announcements on availability. Timely schedules for the SUA and dynamic use of the SUA information will result in enhanced route flexibility. The FAA, military, and civilian users are exploring methods of sharing information about SUA schedules and utilization to afford increased civilian access.

Ops Change Description

The operational change involves procedures to provide more effective distribution of SUA information to service providers, pilots, and other airspace users. The information will foster collaboration among stakeholders and increase flexibility and access. Decision support tools will improve information processing, planning, scheduling, and routing that will provide dynamic use of special-use airspace when available and appropriate.

Benefits, Performance and Metrics

- Improve flight efficiency and reduced flight-leg length when authorized to transit the airspace.

- Reduce the coordination processing time and improve availability of SUA on a near real-time basis.
- Enhance information systems accessibility to all users of the NAS.

Scope and Applicability

Near-Term:

- The FAA, military, and civilian users are exploring methods of sharing information about SUA schedules and utilization to afford increased civilian access. These include Special Use Airspace Management System (SAMS) and Special Use Airspace In-flight Service Enhancement (SUA/ISE). Two operational trials have been undertaken in Florida and Texas to evaluate these proposed collaborative actions. The Florida trial was successfully completed in August 2001. The Texas trial is being developed around several SUA tools to provide near, real-time information on the operational status of the subject airspace. The testing will take place from Ft. Worth Flight Service Station (FSS) with participation from American Eagle and Atlantic Southeast airlines, as well as Texas State Technical College. The test will merge SUA/ISE, SAMS, and Enhanced Traffic Management System (ETMS) through a web-based server at MITRE that will be made available on the Internet for the flying participants. The testing should begin early 2002.

- FAA is also developing the SUA/ISE System to provide near-real time SUA activity information to FSS, en route centers and the ATCSCC on a graphic display, which includes weather and geographical information. The deployment of hardware and software should be completed by August 2002.

- FAA is working with the military concerning several pieces of SUA and obtaining more real-time access. Each of these efforts is being pursued with the military on a case-by-case basis. The Buckeye MOA working group started bi-monthly meetings in June 2001 to facilitate this process.

- FAA and the US Navy have established a Letter of Agreement (LOA) that resulted in Severe Weather Avoidance Procedures (SWAP) Waypoints being developed for the 2001 season. The area encompasses airspace that contains Warning Areas controlled by Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility (FACSFAC) VACAPES. The working group, which includes representatives from various FAA air traffic offices, and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA), is now determining procedures for the offshore area of the U.S. East Coast to be completed in April 2002.

- FAA started developing The Falcon View automation system in January of 2001 to provide an automated platform to accurately coordinate SUA information between DoD and FAA. The testing program and operational procedures will be completed by October 2002.

Mid-Term:

- FAA is continuing to use and evolve the FAA Military Operations Network (MILOPS NET), and continue the interface development between SAMS and Military Airspace Management System (MAMS). These systems will be able to provide SUA scheduling information to all en route centers and the ATCSCC.

- FAA and the US Navy will continue annual establishment of SWAP Waypoints for an offshore area of the U.S. East Coast.

- The Falcon View automation software development and testing will continue.

Key Decisions

- Procedures for sharing SUA availability information have been and will continue to be developed, based on the recommendations from RTCA Special Committee 192 operational trials. The military and FAA are determining the process for improving public dissemination of the information (e.g. improving use with the FAA MILOPS NET).

- Whether to expand the MILOPS NET, a computer system with the ability to house the software packages of SAMS, Central Altitude Reservation Facility (CARF), and NOTAMS, to interface with other computer system, such as MAMS.

Key Risks

- Defining procedures for sharing SUA availability information.
- Ensuring the military can meet its new mission requirements under the Homeland Security criteria.
- Lack of defined improvements or upgrades to automation systems to support SUA processing, and planning in the future.
- SAMS and MAMS interface.
- Sustainability of SAMS and other supporting automation systems.
- Interoperability of SUA information sharing tools and other automation capabilities.
- Improvements or upgrades to automation systems to support near real-time SUA information processing, planning, scheduling, and routing.
- SUA ISE deployment for each AFSS.
- Funding for Communication Network for SUA/ISE.